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DIGEST OF PERIODICAL LITERATURE

Conducted by ELVIRA D. CABELL, Chicago Normal College

THE PROBLEM OF ECONOMY IN ENGLISH

To *School and Society* (April 24) James Fleming Hosis contributes a paper read in February before the Department of Superintendence of the National Education Association on "The Essentials of Composition and Grammar." In this article the writer offers both a résumé of the principal movements initiated during the last decade in the study of English teaching and an interpretation of their significance. It is unlikely, he remarks, that the time devoted to language in the elementary school can safely be cut down. In any event, it is imperative to overhaul and clarify our theory of teaching: "(1) to discover standards which will enable us to decide what to include and what to omit from the language course; (2) to organize and present the chosen material so as to give it continuity, proportion, and a sense of realness; (3) to set up definite goals of achievement, which will stimulate to endeavor but not unduly narrow the path; and (4) to invent measurements which will enable both teacher and principal to know the true state of pupils' minds." And "when we learn how to teach composition, we shall find ourselves able to teach children how to study," for "composition is a method of study, a method of reorganization and interpretation of experience . . . to be learned, if it is learned at all, through purposeful handling of real intellectual problems and interests and not through examination of a corpus of facts selected from the accumulated store of formulations of experience with the phenomena of language."

A rapid description and evaluation of attempts at measuring composition includes (1) the "Tatters" report made in 1905 in Chicago by a committee of which the writer was chairman, (2) the Hillegas-Thorndike scale, (3) the Harvard-Newton scale. The value to teachers of making such an investigation as the last, even if the accuracy achieved by it were not attained, is urged. The "most pressing problem in the upper grades" is declared to be the question of the amount and kind of grammar which the course of study may profitably include. The salient positions of both radical and conservative opinion on this vexed subject are given, and the reports of Franklin S. Hoyt, T. H. Briggs, W. W. Charters, with the

investigation at present progressing under the direction of the department of education of Harvard, are briefly summarized. In regard to standards of attainment in English, the desirability is urged of "fairly definite prescription as to ends" with "reasonable latitude as to means." The textbook is "the real gauge" and should be made to conform to the course of study, instead of the reverse, as is usual at present. A "technique of criticism for textbooks" must be developed.

The following outline of attainment at the end of the sixth year is suggested:

1. To express clearly and consecutively, either in speech or in writing, ideas which are entirely familiar.
2. To avoid, both in speech and in writing, gross incorrectness of grammar.
3. To compose and mail a letter, using a form acceptable for general purposes.
4. To spell the vocabulary which is commonly written and to make sure of new or doubtful words.
5. To read silently and after one reading to reproduce the substance of a simple story, news item, or lesson.
6. To read aloud readily and intelligibly news items from the school paper, lessons from the textbooks being used, or literature of such difficulty as "The Ride of Paul Revere" or Dickens' *Christmas Carol*.
7. To quote accurately and understandingly several short poems, such as Bennet's "The Flag Goes By" and Emerson's "The Mountain and the Squirrel."

THE BLACKBOARD FOR BACKWARD PUPILS IN COMPOSITION

A continuation of the article begun in February, "The Pupil Who Fails in Secondary Education: How to Teach Him," appears in the May number of *Education*. Mr. Gammans' success in bringing up to standard in three weeks a class of backward pupils in composition secured for him the privilege of teaching a second group in like situation. Also, his interest in his former class, composed of pupils of the first and second years of the high school, had led him to volunteer a week's assistance to them in "making up" the reading of their advance classes, lost through the three weeks' compulsory attendance in the review composition class. Since one period only was at his disposal, these three groups—two in literature, one in composition—met him at that period. When at the expiration of the week the two groups in literature went back into their respective classes, the principal of the school put into the instructor's charge certain fourth-year pupils who needed special training in two subjects—poetry and prose reading. Consequently, this second

experiment with backward pupils, the subject of the present paper, was wrought out, from beginning to end, under stress of caring simultaneously, or within one school period, for three groups of pupils.

Under these circumstances the method found most efficacious with the previous class—oral reading and oral correction of written work—was inapplicable, and the instructor brought the blackboard into play. The whole class went to the board with the direction to write a paragraph on an assigned subject. The first day all were through or “satisfied to be through” in ten or fifteen minutes—with practically nothing done. In twenty minutes more, instructions to consider and improve what had been written produced a few negligible corrections. The teacher, having disposed of the two other classes, then went to the board, commended any thought he could find in the work of the few who had really made an effort, tried to show the others why what they had done was not worth while, suggested the most important use of the period and the comma, told them how to correct mistakes in spelling by the visual method (see *Education* for February), and assigned a subject for a short composition to be written at home. The next day some improvement was observed in effort and in power. For these daily board exercises general subjects were given, such as “Trees,” “Grass,” “Cities.” The emphasis was put on quality, not quantity. “Dribble” was sternly discouraged. The main direction was, “Think thirty minutes and write ten.” A few primary suggestions were given for improving and correcting form. In three weeks the success was on the whole as good as in the previous case. The writer commends the plan as applicable, within a regularly constituted class, to pupils below standard.

A feature of the experiment especially emphasized by the writer was his own testing, by the principal, before and during his assignment to this work, as to his ability to write thought-paragraphs. The principal also visited the class frequently “to see what I called real thoughts” in the composition.

Two specimens are given of home work produced by the pupil judged by the writer the poorest in the class. The first was written near the beginning, the second near the end, of the course. The first followed a short talk by the instructor on the subject, the second was assigned without comment.

THEME I. SCULPTURE

Sculpture is one of most difficult arts to master. You must have patience in doing this work. You must also be skilful in other line of work. A sculpture most told how to handle different tools correctly.

THEME 2. PATRIOTISM

If one wants to be a patriot, he must first love his country and do all in his power to help his country. When war is on he must answer to the call of soldiers. Today people have left this country to help their country in the war which is going on in the foreign lands. This shows a great deal of patriotism and they are always rewarded for their good work.

EDITING TO KILL

Under this suggestive title an article by John B. Opdycke in the April number of the *School Review* argues that classics for high-school use need to be rescued from pedantry. Either the proportion now common between text and editorial matter is wrong—according to the table given it ranges from about half and half to two-thirds editorial matter, one-third text—or the text needing so much elucidation is too difficult for high-school pupils. A large number of “specimens” of textual comment are given, classified variously as superfluous, above the heads of high-school pupils, obscure, inane. The tendency of editors to furnish long lists of “topics” for composition is stingingly adverted to. The only consolation for all this, according to the writer, is that “most teachers and pupils ignore the editorial matter entirely. . . . Teachers are coming to understand that a classic cannot be *taught*; that it must be touched lightly, and that inspiration is quite as necessary for literary appreciation as for literary composition.”

FORCIBLE FEEDING OF HIGH-SCHOOL PUPILS

In an article in the May issue of the *Pennsylvania Journal* on “Outside Reading of High-School Pupils,” Sylvia Hall gives some amusing and illuminating notes upon the outcome of her desperate determination, taken after various tragic experiences, “not to beg or cajole but to demand of English classes the reading of a specified number of books outside of school and the reporting upon them within definite intervals of time.” Of pupils who have formed the habit of reading all that comes within their reach, good or bad, of pupils whose reading has been wisely directed from childhood, she has nothing to say. The article concerns itself with the remaining two classes—pupils who read voluntarily only mawkish or noxious stuff and those who read nothing at all. These felt the vigor of her onslaught and were gradually subdued to the useful and the good—to “The Courtship of Miles Standish,” Scott’s *Rob Roy*, and Emerson’s *Self-Reliance*.

DIFFICULTIES OF THE TEACHER OF ENGLISH

A report of a special committee of teachers to the English section of the Colorado Teachers' Association, published in the April number of the *Colorado School Journal*, presents the results of a year's investigation among teachers of English of (1) special difficulties encountered, (2) devices and methods found helpful. The results are almost wholly along the first of these lines of inquiry; for, as the report somewhat ruefully admits, "most of the teachers have difficulties; few have remedies." A list of seventeen of these "difficulties" is given, closing significantly with "the teacher's own personal dislike for the teaching of English." The committee finds that the work in English is more carelessly done than that in any other subject, a fact attributed by it to a persistent idea (in Colorado) that anyone can teach English. Along with this weakness appears, naturally enough, another—an almost complete lack of co-operation between teachers of English and teachers of other subjects. This lack, they say, extends even to failure to appreciate the possibilities or the meaning of such co-operation. The report furnishes impressive evidence of the almost universal overwork of teachers of English. No teachers were found having less than four periods a day, with supervision or office work filling in the other periods; many had six periods daily; some as many as seven periods. One free period daily for the correction of themes was a rarity.

BOOK NOTICES

[Mention under this head does not preclude review elsewhere.]

The Salon and English Letters. By CHAUNCEY BREWSTER TINKER. New York: Macmillan, 1915. Pp. 290. \$2.25.

Handsomely printed and of absorbing interest. The treatment reveals a wide and most intimate acquaintance with both the life and the literature of England and the Continent during the eighteenth century. The particular period covered is the age of Johnson.

The English Essay and Essayists. By HUGH WALKER. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1915. Pp. 342. \$1.50.

An addition to the admirable "Channels of Literature" series, edited by Oliphant Smeaton. Like its predecessors, the present volume is an excellent, perhaps the best, treatment of its subject.

The Oxford Book of American Essays. By BRANDER MATTHEWS. New York: Oxford University Press, 1914. Pp. 508.

Thirty-two authors are represented, ranging from Benjamin Franklin to Samuel Crothers and William P. Trent. The choice is on the whole excellent, though some of the pieces are not "essays" in the strict sense of the word.